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SUBJECT: IRAQ'S PARLIAMENT SPEAKER SITES COOPERATION DEFICIT

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Council of Representatives (CoR) Speaker Mahmoud Mashhadani relayed the full slate of Sunni Tawafuq bloc complaints to the Ambassador May 19, noting the challenges facing the CoR as pressure builds for it to take on hydrocarbons and de-Ba'athification reform laws, which he stressed he could do nothing about until they were actually in the CoR -- nor was he sanguine about GoI implementation of laws in general. A weak cabinet in dire need of expert "technocrats" in key ministries, compounded by poor coordination between elements of the GoI, further hampers the governance process. The CoR is a pivotal player in solving these issues, emphasized the Ambassador, and should show leadership as it takes on key legislative initiatives. Mashhadani expressed concern about the Sadrist's ability to garner 144 signatures on an anti-MNF petition and skepticism about whether the constitutional review process will tackle serious issues. End Summary.

Tawafuq woes and political squabbles

12. (C) Speaker Mashhadani told the Ambassador that Tawafuq was running out of patience with the political process, to which the Ambassador called for strategic patience in light of the clear, albeit limited, progress that Iraq has made in the last four years. In a pessimistic and reflective mood, Mashhadani said times were tough for a political bloc that saw little benefit from participation in the current government; the Speaker himself is stuck between Tawafuq wanting him to represent its interests and his role as Speaker "representing all Iraqis." He cited well-worn Tawafuq complaints about raids on houses of political figures, long-term detainees, few ministerial portfolios, a million displaced Sunnis, the lack of an authoritative role for VP al-Hashemi, and Iran's increasing influence.

13. (C) Citing discord between various political blocs within the CoR, Mashhadani said each reported problems to him but none offered a way forward -- although they paid lip service to the democratic process. Rumors of withdrawal by various parties continued to hinder constructive dialogue. Many blocs are also "divided against themselves," he lamented. Discussing high-stakes laws like the hydrocarbons package will add pressure to a CoR already burdened by internal squabbles, against the backdrop of a larger GoI with limited influence.

Need a strong GoI with closer coordination

14. (C) A strong cabinet of experts is needed, the Speaker emphasized repeatedly, rather than ministers tied to political interests. He had pressed the PM to take advantage of the opening created by a Sadrist withdrawal from the cabinet. Nonetheless, the PM "chooses ministers from Najaf and Karbala" rather than seeking out experts; no nominees hail from the large province of Diyala, for example, which

certainly has qualified technocrats. The answer is not to replace the PM, he asserted, but to work with him to install an appropriately experienced cabinet.

15. (C) The CoR is powerless without a strong executive branch, Mashhadani stated, and cannot produce laws effectively without confidence in their implementation; "I as an individual cannot do much." Further lamenting the poor coordination between the CoR and other elements of the GoI, he said relations relied on paperwork back and forth and that President Talabani had never called him directly during the CoR's first full year of operation. The GoI response to the April 12 suicide bombing at the CoR had been very weak, he said, and now the GoI is slow to even present the all-important hydrocarbons law to the CoR. After passage of that (or any other) law, it is the GoI which must ensure implementation "tomorrow and ten years down the road," so success is not a function of the CoR passing a piece of paper forward. Success is in the implementation.

16. (C) "What can we do" about the hydrocarbons law when it has not been submitted to the CoR, said the Speaker. Others should not blame the CoR for slow progress when the ball is in another court. Additionally, the GoI should discuss the CoR schedule (and summer recess) with CoR leaders directly, not through the media, he opined. As further evidence of faulty GoI coordination, he said the CoR had been given the "wrong text" of a Ministry of National Security Affairs law, which was read in the April 25 session (but has been put on hold).

17. (C) The Ambassador emphasized the importance of the CoR as a legislative institution and the Speaker as its leader, pressing Mashhadani to focus on his responsibility to ensure

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GoI progress on key reconciliation initiatives. The hydrocarbons law was undergoing serious negotiations and would be with the parliament soon, at which point it needed timely attention. A draft law on de-Ba'athification reform was also anticipated soon. The Ambassador emphasized the legislature's pivotal role in producing a legal framework for reconciliation. The withdrawal of any political bloc at this sensitive time would be a disaster, he stressed.

Unhelpful political maneuvers

18. (C) Mashhadani cited the 144 CoR members who signed a petition calling for a time-table for MNF withdrawal at a time when others (including him) agree with the ongoing surge. Internal political struggles stifle productive debate. The Sadrists seek to create a security vacuum into which the Jeish al-Mahdi (JAM) can intervene, and Mashhadani was agitated that this 30-member grouping could rally the signatures of 144 members from a cross-section of the CoR, thus "hijacking" the institution. People talk as if the issues they discuss are a distant concern ("are we on the moon?") when in fact the issues impinge on urgent security needs. The "parliamentary culture" requires that the voice of CoR members be heard, said Mashhadani, regardless of merit. He added that 120 members were calling for his removal and that a majority of the CoR could even topple a government.

A complex agenda in less than ideal circumstances

19. (C) Compounding the problems already articulated, the Speaker said parliamentarians feared for their safety. Discussions were difficult in any scenario, but focused consideration of de-Ba'athification reform will be further hampered by JAM obstructionism. On constitutional reform, Mashhadani said agreement was being reached on the easier elements, but that issues of the nation's identity, federalism, handling of Kirkuk, and authorities of the PM

("is he an Emperor?"), would be difficult. He was not optimistic about finding timely solutions and said Tawafuq was monitoring progress of the debate without participating productively. Mashhadani agreed that a Tawafuq withdrawal would be a disaster, but added that the status quo may be worse.

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